

First Principles Of The Oracles Of God

Lesson 6

“By What Authority Do You Do These Things?” (Mt. 21:23) — Understanding Preliminary Concepts On Biblical Authority —

Why Study Biblical Authority?

In some realms of life, it is not necessary to discuss authority to be successful.

- **Politics.** Under our form of government, we have competing parties that have equal access and protection under law. If one doesn't like the party he is affiliated with, he can join another one. Additionally, there are other forms of rule besides ours. All are appointed by God and are therefore legitimate in His sight. If one doesn't like living under a monarchy, he can move to a country that is ruled as a republic, and vice versa. One alternative is as good as another.
- **Economics.** Different theories abound in this realm. Given the economy is always fluctuating, it is necessary that we be able to adapt to changes in marketplaces by changing our strategies, sometimes at a moment's notice. So, in a broad sense, all economic theories are viable and, therefore, important.

However, there is every reason to discuss authority in the realm of **religion**. In this realm, man has no say absolutely at all. ***God has it all*** (Mt. 28:18). This is why it is vital to study Biblical authority. Religion is the ***only*** realm that carries eternal consequences. If you pick the wrong political party or theory of economics, so what? If you violate the authority of God, you stand to lose your soul for all of eternity.

Anytime a departure occurs from God's "pattern," ***sin has been committed***. The subject matter can be:

- what we must do to gain salvation (*man's **most** important need*)
- the identity, organization, work of the church
- any other activity done in the name of religion

If what results from human efforts is not like the "pattern" revealed in the Scripture (cp. Heb. 8:5), it will not be pleasing to God...even if those involved approve of what has been done.

This is especially important for young Christians to understand. Every issue that has divided the Lord's people has been fought over the basic principle of Biblical authority. Young Christians today were not around when those battles were fought ages ago. Through no fault of their own, they will not be as able to make proper applications as will older saints. Therefore, it is needful that this subject be thoroughly taught to every generation. It is important that every disciple of Christ always have a good understanding of Biblical authority. It is necessary for the following reasons:

- ◆ Man cannot direct himself eternally (Jer. 10:23; Prov. 20:24)
- ◆ The Lord Jesus cautions against acting without His authority (Mt. 7:21-23)
- ◆ Brethren in the 1st century abused Biblical authority (Acts 15)
- ◆ Brethren in our day have abused Biblical authority (**Liberalism**)
- ◆ Brethren in the future will abuse Biblical authority over some yet-to-be determined issue

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The Importance Of Biblical Authority

Having a solid understanding on Biblical authority is important for 2 main reasons.

- 1) *Knowing how to define, understand, and properly apply Biblical authority allows one to be well-equipped in dealing with unbelievers, or with brethren who want to take the Lord's church with them down the road of apostasy.*

If one does not understand Biblical authority, he is like the one described in **Eph. 4:14**, a child who will be "tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;..." No matter what the issue is, it is to be decided by the "pattern" God left us, the Scripture. If we do not understand the principles of Biblical authority as it pertains to the issue, we will not be able to defend God's "pattern" and are likely to be swept away ourselves in the apostasy.

- 2) *Knowing how to define, understand, and properly apply Biblical authority allows the people of God to retain their distinctiveness in a world full of sin, and to serve God in work and worship in the way He has ordained.*

Jesus Himself prayed that His disciples would not become like the world (**Jn. 17:14-17**). The apostle Paul instructed saints to not conform their thinking to worldly standards, but to make up their minds to serve God according to the gospel (**Rom. 12:1-2**). God has *always* told His people that they were going to be different than everybody else (**Ex. 19:5-6; 1 Pet. 2:9-10**). In order to please God in this way, we must understand the principles of Biblical authority. It is hypocrisy to address Jesus as "Lord" when we don't follow the "pattern" (**Lk. 6:46**).

To illustrate this, consider the following survey conducted among institutional churches of Christ:

Surveyors: Mr. Robert Oglesby, Jr. and Mr. Carley Dodd

Sponsor: Abilene Christian University

Population: 530 teens, ages 11-19 who attend churches of Christ

- ◆ 16% think there is little difference between the church of Christ & denominations
- ◆ 90% think instrumental music is acceptable in worship
- ◆ 69% believe Christians can dress, talk, etc. like the world
- ◆ 69% believe church membership doesn't matter as long as you love God

Do we think that just because we are of the "conservative," non-institutional church of Christ that we are immune from such a mindset that threatens our existence as God's distinct people? This is why it is imperative we know the "old paths, where the good way is" (**Jer. 6:16; 2 Pet. 3:1-2**). This is why our young people need to be constantly exposed to plain Bible teaching so that when they face issues that will threaten the Lord's body, they'll know the "pattern."

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The Need For Biblical Authority

Imagine a world without any authority. The only group that would be happy about such an arrangement would be the criminals. Everyone else would suffer. As a general rule, men and women everywhere recognize the need for authority:

- ◆ Society depends on authority vested in law enforcement
- ◆ Commerce has had authority of standards, weights and measures since Bible days
- ◆ Communication would grind to a halt without authority of language and the meaning of words
- ◆ Everyday interaction among humans would cease without authority of keeping time

The alternative in a world without authority is chaos.

Biblically, the most confusing time may have been the period of The Judges. For some 350 years, anarchy reigned in Israel because "...every man did what was right in his own eyes" (**Judg. 17:6**). For this reason, not only was there no spiritual progress, there was only decline and decay. From the depths of this God would use the strength of a united kingdom in which His law was to be respected and obeyed (**1 Sam. 12:14-15; 1 Kings 2:3-4**).

In our day, religious "anarchy" is equally confusing. A sincere searcher for truth is perplexed because of all the available "choices" [*material on pages 8-10.*] All are advertised as viable; "one is as good as another." Desiring fellowship with God, he will have to know in which direction to turn to find the truth that will set him free (**Jn. 8:31-32**). Without finally considering the subject of Biblical authority, he is doomed to failure. The division and confusion in religion is directly attributable to the failure among churches with conflicting doctrines to adhere to a single standard of authority. The prevailing motto is, "It doesn't matter what you believe or practice, as long as you're sincere. You believe what you want to, and I'll believe what I want to." The result is anything but what the Lord prayed for and desires (**Jn. 17:17-21**).

Not only is there a necessity for authority in *collective* activity, authority is also needed in *individual* accountability. The Bible is equally accessible to all. If it wasn't, God would have no basis for holding all of humanity individually accountable to what was not universally available. Therefore, even if everyone else is doing wrong, I am still authorized to do right, and I must still submit to the authority of the Scripture (**cp. Mt. 25:14-30; esp. v. 23; 2 Cor. 13:5; Rev. 3:4**).

Clearly, the need for authority in religion should be obvious to all.

Questions

1. What is the relevant question found in **Mt. 21:23-27**? How does it properly identify our choices?
2. In this same episode, how did the Jews show they also recognized authority in religion? (**v. 25b**)

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3. What does the incident involving Nadab & Abihu teach us about authority? (Lev. 10:1-2)

4. From 2 Chron. 26:16-20, besides doing the right thing, what else does authority teach us? (cp. Ex. 30:7)

5. What does the statement from the apostles in Acts 15:24 suggest about authority? What does it say about the apostles, and also those who were teaching contrary to them?

6. In Jer. 2:13, God compares His will to what man often uses as a substitute. What did Jehovah label that for which the people had forsaken Him? What comparison do you think is being made?

7. Comment below on some of the "broken cisterns" used as authority in religion in lieu of the Bible. Try to use a Bible passage that will illustrate your answer(s).

Parents _____

Conscience _____

Human wisdom _____

Preachers _____

Feelings _____

Human creeds _____

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The Authority Of Christ & The Apostles

Our appeal should *not* just be made to the authority of the New Testament. Rather, we should appeal to the authority of Jesus Christ. Without Christ, the Bible is meaningless. By what He did, Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament. By who He is, Christ made possible the New Testament which tells us about Him.

As an extension of Himself, Jesus hand-chose and sent out certain men ("apostles") to carry on His work after His departure. Saying the apostles had "authority" doesn't deify them; it simply recognizes the special role into which the Lord placed them. When one "receives" the words of an apostle, he is, in fact, listening to Christ and to the Father who sent Him into the world (cp. Lk. 10:16; Jn. 13:20). When one faithfully abides by and teaches what the apostles taught, he teaches what Jesus Christ taught (cp. Mt. 28:20). Their teachings are inseparable. They are identical in nature. Therefore, we understand the authority of Jesus Christ to be *inherent*...the authority of His apostles is *delegated*.

The Authority of Jesus Christ

When wrestling with any religious issue, our final appeal must be to Christ. In all reality, His word is the "final word" (cp. Heb. 1:1-2). Establishing the authority of Jesus goes a long way towards establishing the authority of the New Testament. Notice the different ways in which Jesus expressed His authority:

- ◆ by the claims He made about Himself
 - He claimed to have been sent by the Father (Jn. 7:16-17; 12:48-50; 14:23-24)
 - who is He according to Heb. 3:1?

- ◆ by the claims He made about man's destiny
 - how we treat Him determines our eternal future (Lk. 12:8-9)
 - how are we described based on our reaction to His words? (Mt. 7:24, 26)

- ◆ by the authority inherent in His works
 - these works bore witness that He had been sent by God (Jn. 5:36)
 - what could Jesus do? (Mt. 9:1-8)

 - what did Jesus ask His disciples to do in Jn. 14:10-11?

 - for what purpose were the works of Jesus recorded? (Jn. 20:30-31)

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- d. Jn. 20:23

- 6. When the early church began, what distinguished their activities in teaching and preaching the gospel? (**Acts 2:42a**) Where did the apostles get this doctrine? (**Mt. 28:20**)

- 7. How authoritative was what Paul preached to the Galatians? (**Gal. 1:6-9**)